



Cotton: From the Field to your Family

Cotton- Frequently Asked Questions & Answers

1. What is cotton?

Cotton is a fiber, feed and food crop. It has been cultivated since ancient times for its lint, which is used to make a variety of textiles. The oldest fibers and boll fragments, dated from around 5000 B.C., were discovered in Mexico. Cotton is very versatile, it is nature's wonder fiber, providing thousands of useful products and supporting millions of jobs as it moves year after year from field to fabric.

2. What country grows the most cotton?

China is first, with a 3-year average of 33 million bales of cotton.

India is second, with a 3-year average of 26.8 million bales of cotton

United States is third, with a 3-year average of 17 million bales of cotton

3. Where is cotton grown in the United States?

Cotton is grown in 17 states stretching across the southern half of the United States: Alabama, Arkansas, Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Kansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia.

4. What state grows the most cotton?

Texas, whose 3-year average production was almost 5.5 million bales for the years 2010-2012

5. What is a module?

Once cotton is harvested, it is stored in modules- which hold 13 to 15 bales of cotton- for protection against the weather. Modules are stored in the field or on the gin yard until the cotton is ginned.

6. When is cotton planted and when is it harvested in the U.S.?

Cotton is planted as early as Feb 1 in South Texas and as late as June 1 in northern areas of the cotton belt. Harvesting of the crop begins in July in South Texas and extends to late November in more northern climates.

7. How is cotton harvested?

Three mechanical systems are used to harvest cotton. Cotton picking machines use rotating spindles to pick (twist) the seed cotton from the burr. Doffers then remove the seed cotton from the spindles and drop the seed cotton into the conveying system. Cotton stripping machines use rollers equipped with bats and brushes to knock the open bolls from the plants into a conveyor. A third kind of harvester uses a broadcast attachment similar to a grain header on a combine. All harvesting systems use air to elevate the seed cotton into a basket where it is stored until it can be dumped into a boll buggy, trailer or module builder.

8. How many cotton farms are there in the U.S.?

Cotton is produced on about 18,600 farms in the U.S.

9. How many acres of cotton are harvested each year in the U.S.?

For the years 2010 through 2012, average harvested area was 9.8 million acres, producing an average 17.0 million bales.

10. What is a Boll Weevil?

The boll weevil is the primary insect enemy of cotton. An adult is $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch long, appearing tan to dark brown or gray in color, has a hard humpback-shaped shell and the characteristic snout accounting for about $\frac{1}{4}$ of its length. This pest has plagued U.S. cotton producers since 1892. It can complete an entire lifecycle in three weeks, lay 200 eggs per female—each in a separate cotton square or boll, ensuring the destruction of each—and spread rapidly, covering 40 to 160 miles per year.

11. What is an Aphid?

Cotton aphid is the most common aphid on cotton in California and it can be present at any time during the growing season. Cotton aphid is highly variable in body size and color, and adults may be winged or wingless. Nymphs and adults of wingless cotton aphids vary in color from yellow to green to nearly black.

The different forms of the cotton aphid differ in their ability to cause population outbreaks and plant damage, therefore it is important to be aware not only of the number of aphids present, but also of their color form.

Additionally, damage caused by cotton aphid varies seasonally with the growth stage of the plant. Heavy populations on seedling cotton can cause crinkling and cupping of leaves, failing to expand, defoliation, and a severe stunting of seedling growth. In addition, honeydew contamination on leaves may make the leaves appear wet and shiny. Cotton appears to be able to compensate fully for early season damage as long as the aphid feeding ceases.

12. What is a Whitefly?

Whiteflies are tiny, sap-sucking insects. They excrete sticky honeydew and cause yellowing or death of leaves. Outbreaks often occur when the natural biological control is disrupted. Management is difficult.

Whiteflies usually occur in groups on the undersides of leaves. They derive their name from the mealy white wax covering the adult's wings and body. Adults are tiny insects with yellowish bodies and whitish wings.

Whiteflies develop rapidly in warm weather, and populations can build up quickly in situations where natural enemies are destroyed and weather is favorable. Most whiteflies, especially the most common pest species—greenhouse whitefly (*Trialeurodes vaporariorum*) and silverleaf or sweetpotato whiteflies (*Bemisia* species)—have a wide host range that includes many weeds and crops. In many parts of California, they breed all year, moving from one host to another as plants are harvested or dry up.

13. What percentage of the U.S. Cotton crop is exported?

From 2010 through 2012, an average of 65 percent of the U.S. cotton supply was exported.

14. How much cotton does the U.S. textile mills use?

From 2010 through 2012, mills consumed an average of 3.6 million bales per year.

15. How much business revenue does the U.S. cotton crop stimulate?

Latest estimates indicate that the cotton industry generates \$27 billion in revenues to various industry segments. Cotton's total economic activity is estimated at some \$100 billion

Information gathered from the National Cotton Council of America & the
Statewide Integrated Pest Management Program